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ABSTRACT

Subjective indicators were used to measure perceived overall quality of life and the value placed on and satisfaction with life concerns of some rural, white families in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. A human ecological systems approach which assumes that human needs are satisfied through use of resources of the natural, human-constructed, and behavioral environments was used. The fundamental proposition was that perceived quality of life is a function of degree of satisfaction with what is valued. Instruments consisted of scale for measurement of perceived overall quality of life, a Self-Anchoring Ladder of Importance (SAII) to measure values, and a Self-Anchoring Ladder of Satisfaction (SAIS) to measure satisfaction with twenty-one life concerns. Analysis of variance, correlations and multiple regression techniques were used. Most respondents were highly satisfied with the quality of their lives; overall quality of life varied significantly with family structure. Family life ranked highest in importance and in satisfaction. The presence of children or other persons in the home was found to contribute significantly to persons' perceived quality of life. Stepwise regression analysis revealed that satisfaction with family life, work, accomplishment and financial security accounted for approximately 54 percent of the variance in perceived overall quality of life. (Author)

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Preliminary Paper

THE FAMILY, VALUES, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Margaret J. Bubolz*

Introduction

Widespread concern with the quality of life has stimulated much discussion and rhetoric in academic and scholarly circles as well as in the political and policy arena. There are currently many attempts to define this phenomenon and to develop social indicators of quality of life (Quality of Life Indicators in the U. S. Metropolitan Areas, 1970, 1975; The Quality of Life Concept, 1973; McCall, 1975). The majority of indicators that have been proposed consist of so-called "objective" indicators based on information about such things as income, employment, health, education, cultural resources, political participation, safety and environmental quality of particular geographic or governmental units or certain populations.

There have also been studies which collect more subjective information relevant to various aspects of quality of life (Andrews and Withey, 1977; Rodgers and Converse, 1976).

This paper reports preliminary research findings related to family structure, the importance placed upon and satisfaction with family life, and their relationship to perceived overall quality of life. The data reported are based on subjective, or perceptual indicators. Both objective and perceptual indicators, as well as measures of the interaction between them, are considered necessary to a more complete understanding of quality of life. The research reported is part

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of a longitudinal project, the objectives of which were to study, not only quality of life but also, change and stability in a rural Michigan county.* Another aim was to secure information for use in programs and policies related to rural development.

Data are reported from interviews conducted in the spring of 1975 with 65 persons, representing 40% of the households originally interviewed in 1956. Respondents lived in two townships in Ontonagon County in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, an area characterized by relative geographic isolation, with the nearest metropolitan areas 150 miles distant. Respondents ranged in age from 42 to 85, with the median 61 years. Fifty-seven percent were females. Eighty-one percent were married; eighteen percent single, widowed, divorced or separated. Just under one-fourth had children under 20 living at home; 65% were families without dependent children at home and the remainder (12%) lived alone. One-fourth had incomes under $4000; only 12% had incomes above $12,000. The incomes of over one-half were under $8000. All respondents were rural and white.

A human ecological systems approach which considers the relationships of

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*This research was supported by the Agricultural Experiment Station, Michigan State University, East Lansing, as Project No. 3151, Rural Development Research. Co-director was Dr. Joanne Eicher, formerly Professor in the Department of Human Environment and Design, now, Head, Department of Textiles and Clothing, University of Minnesota. Sandra Evers and Sara Butler, who were graduate students in Family Ecology assisted. Dr. Evers is now at North Dakota State University and Dr. Butler is at Miami University. The longitudinal data are reported in Satisfaction with Rural Community: A Longitudinal Study in the Upper Peninsula, Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station Research Report, in press. A report of the Quality of Life findings is contained in: A Human Ecological Approach to Quality of Life: Conceptual Framework and Results of a Preliminary Study, an unpublished paper.

people to their natural, human constructed and human behavioral environments of family, home and community was used as the overall conceptual framework of the research project (Bubolz, Eicher and Sontag, 1977). A model of the Human Ecosystem is presented in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here.

Conceptually, perceived quality of life was broadly defined as referring to the degree of well-being or ill-being of people and the environment in which they live (Garn and Flax, 1973). This conception of quality of life is based on need satisfaction and valuation. We assumed that humans have physical, social and psychological needs which must be satisfied with human and other resources of the environment. We further assumed that needs and their satisfaction are important, that they are of value and represent desired conditions or goals. Our basic proposition was that people's perception of their quality of life is a function of how well satisfied they are with what they consider important. What they consider important will vary, but is a reflection of physical, social and psychological needs. Figure 2 presents a schematic diagram of the framework of the study.

Insert Figure 2 here.

Instruments

Perceived overall quality of life was measured with a scale developed by Andrews and Withey of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (1974). The scale consists of a single question which asks people to rate how they feel about their life as a whole (see Figure 3.) We asked the question twice, once near the beginning of the interview and as the final question. The arithmetic mean of the two rankings was used as the measure of perceived overall

quality of life (POQL).

Insert Figure 3 here.

A Self-Anchoring Ladder of Importance scale (SALI) was developed to obtain rankings of the value or importance placed on 21 life concerns. Respondents were asked to place the items on one of five steps on a ladder, on which the top step represented things of very high importance, and the bottom step things of no importance.

A Self-Anchoring Ladder of Satisfaction (SALS) was developed to obtain degree of satisfaction with the same 21 items as in the SALI scale. Respondents rated their satisfaction on a seven step ladder which had the same scale positions as the overall QOL scale.

Items used in the scales were selected from 123 items used by Andrews and Withey. Their findings had suggested that a relatively modest number of concerns could be used as perceptual indicators of overall life quality, provided they were distributed over a range of concerns. The items we used represented the ecological approach of our research with emphasis on human needs and values and interaction with the near environment. Items used are contained in Figure 4.

Insert Figure 4 here.

Findings

As a total group respondents felt quite satisfied with their life as a whole (see Table 1.) The mean score was 2.9 indicating an overall feeling of being mostly satisfied. No one indicated they were mostly dissatisfied or said that "unhappy" or "terrible" described how they felt about life as a whole.

Insert Table 1 here.

Significant differences were found in overall quality of life scores for persons in varying family structures (see Table 2.) Persons living alone were the least satisfied, while those whose family included children under 20 living at home were the most satisfied; adults with no dependent children were in between*

Insert Table 2 here.

Differences were also found in overall quality of life scores for persons in different income groups: as income went up, perceived overall quality of life went up (see Table 3.) Analysis of variance was computed; the differences were found to be significant at the .05 level. Differences in POQL between the three lowest income groups were not large; however the $12,000 and above income group was considerably more satisfied with life.

Insert Table 3 here.

In light of this finding, an attempt was made to see whether family structure or income made a greater difference in POQL. Respondents were dichotomized into two income groups: those whose incomes were above $8000 were classified as high and those below $8000 as low. Mean POQL scores of high and low income groups by family structure are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 here.

The differences were small and not statistically significant but the direction of the scores indicated that the combination of high income and children at

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*Twenty was used as the cut-off age for dependent children because all of the children under 20 living at home were considered dependent; they were either in school or not working away from home.

home was related to the highest perceived quality of life. Low income families with children did have slightly higher scores than high income families without children at home.

For the group as a whole, family life ranked highest in importance on the SALI scale; 52 (87%) of 60 persons ranking this item placed it on the top step. Family life also ranked highest in satisfaction; 24 (40%) out of 60 ranked it at the top (7th) step, 19 (32%) on the next, 14 on the next and 3 on step 4. The standard deviation for importance was less than for satisfaction (.645 and .918, respectively.) The correlation between the two rankings (.2558) was significant ($p<.05$). However, while the two rankings were both high and related, for the group as a whole family life ranked higher in importance than in satisfaction.

Analysis of the relationship of the discrepancy between importance placed on family life and degree of satisfaction with it revealed that 72% of the respondents had no discrepancy between their SALI and SALS scores. This was the highest percentage for any of the items.*

There was no difference in importance placed on family life by family structure. Those who lived alone, families who had children at home and those without dependent children at home all valued family life equally highly. There was no significant difference either in their degree of satisfaction with family life. However, there was a tendency for those with dependent children at home to be most satisfied, those living alone to be least satisfied, and families without dependent children to be in between.**

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*To compute discrepancy scores, the seven point SALS scale was reduced to a five point scale by combining the two highest rankings (delighted and pleased) and the two lowest (unhappy and terrible) into two single ranks. The SALS rank was subtracted from the SALI rank to obtain the discrepancy score.

**Most of these were married couples with a few cases of an adult or couple with an aged parent, or a parent with an adult employed child.

The importance or value placed on family life was significantly correlated ($p<.05$) with perceived overall quality of life, but satisfaction with family life was even more significantly correlated with overall quality of life ($p<.001$).

Further support for the contribution that satisfaction with family life played in overall quality of life was revealed through a step wise regression analysis which indicated that family life, along with satisfaction with work, accomplishing something and financial security accounted for nearly 54% of the variance in perceived overall quality of life (see Table 5.)

Insert Table 5 here.

Discussion

While our sample is very small, skewed toward the older years, entirely rural, white and relatively low income, some of the findings are substantiated by findings with national samples reported by Andrews and Withey (1974), and Rodgers and Converse (1975). The latter found, as we did, that people reported they were generally quite satisfied with their life as a whole; they also found that rural respondents were more satisfied than urban. While we have no urban comparison group, our rural sample was quite satisfied. They also found, as we did, that those with higher reported money incomes were more satisfied. We thus have reason to believe that our sample may be rather representative of similar rural populations.

The findings related to family and perceived quality of life are admittedly inconclusive but they raise several important theoretical and policy questions. We found that those who lived alone had the lowest perceived quality of life. This finding is similar to those of Rodgers and Converse who found that divorced, separated or single respondents had quite or very low scores. Widowed respondents were somewhat less satisfied than those still married whose children had left home (Rodgers and Converse, 1975). Apparently, living alone, without a sup-

porting spouse, children, or significant others is importantly related to how one perceives his/her quality of life. Rodgers and Converse (1975) report that among married respondents, the least satisfied were those with young children, while the most satisfied were those whose children were grown.

Because our study is a longitudinal one and the sample was first drawn 20 years ago, it is heavily weighted toward the later stages of life, with just about one-fourth having children under 20 at home. We cannot, therefore, compare perceived quality of life across the total family life cycle. However, we found that those whose children were not yet launched were more satisfied than those without dependent children at home.

While we did not ask about the importance placed upon having children, we did find that the great majority of the group had children. We may, therefore, assume a high valuation on children. If our basic proposition that quality of life is a function of the fit between importance of a life concern, and satisfaction with it is valid, it suggests that the importance placed upon having children may influence quality of life. If children are highly valued, their presence in the home may add to life satisfaction. On the other hand, problems related to children might also decrease life satisfaction. We do not have the data to test these hypotheses, but our findings suggest that they may be worth pursuing in future research.

Our finding that satisfaction with family life was one of the items which accounted for a considerable share of the variance in overall quality of life is supported by Andrews and Withey (1973, 1974). They found that a family index comprised of satisfaction with children, spouse and marriage and an item reflecting satisfaction with things the respondent and family did together were two of the 12 items which could explain about half of the overall variance in perceived overall quality of life.

Our study did not probe for reasons why family life loomed as such an important factor for our respondents and why it was so significantly related to quality of life.* However, we assume that family members help meet essential needs for love, belonging, and communication. The family also provides the environment in which physical and other needs are often met. Our basic proposition was that people's perception of their quality of life is a function of how well satisfied they are with what they consider important. What is considered important is a reflection of physical, social and psychological needs. Our findings showing that family life ranked highest in both importance and satisfaction appear to support this proposition. They also illustrate the viability of a human ecological model which includes the human behavioral environment, along with the other environments as a unifying framework for conceptualization and study of quality of life.

Conclusions

Our findings lend empirical support to the need for inclusion of consideration of the value placed upon, and satisfaction with, family life as one of the important factors to take into account in defining and measuring quality of life. Further, they suggest that policies and programs designed to enhance quality of life must take into account actions which support family life and which can alleviate the dissatisfaction with life associated with living alone.

Family scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines must join the economists, environmentalists, sociologists, political scientists, community planners and others who are currently on the forefront of conceptualizing and measuring quality of life and setting policy related to it. Their input is needed in the development of a total systems approach to this elusive phe-

*We are currently planning a continuation of our research on Quality of Life and will investigate in detail the factors involved which influence satisfaction with family life and Overall Quality of Life.

nomenon, lest the significant human interactions and satisfactions, as well as frustrations and problems, associated with being a member of a family are overlooked. Family professionals have long espoused the view that one's family relations are among the most significant of all associations formed by human beings. It would appear that they are indeed significant to how one feels about life and to how one evaluates his/her quality of life.

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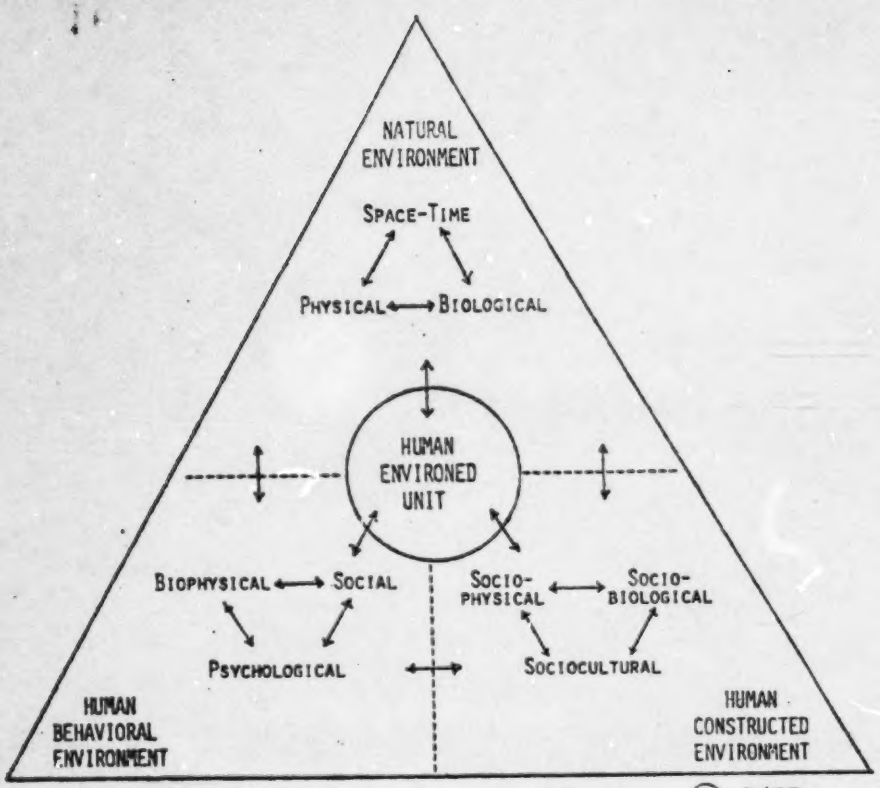

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HUMAN ENVIRONED UNIT

A. A SINGLE INDIVIDUAL; OR

B. A PLURALITY OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE SOME FEELINGS OF UNITY, SHARE SOME COMMON RESOURCES, GOALS, VALUES, AND INTERESTS AND HAVE SOME SENSE OF COMMON IDENTITY.

THE HUMAN ENVIRONED UNIT IS LOCATED IN A PARTICULAR SPACE AT A POINT IN TIME.

INTERACTION

INTERACTION IN AN ECOSYSTEM OCCURS WHEN ANY PART OF AN ECOSYSTEM INFLUENCES OR ACTS ON ANY OTHER PART AND IS INFLUENCED OR ACTED UPON IN RETURN.

INTERACTION CAN TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE ENVIRONED UNIT, BETWEEN THE ENVIRONMENTS, BETWEEN COMPONENTS WITHIN AN ENVIRONMENT, AND BETWEEN THE ENVIRONED UNIT AND ENVIRONMENT(S).

TRANSACTION

TRANSACTION IS A SEQUENCE OF INTERACTIONS ACROSS SYSTEMS WHICH LEADS TO AN END.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT: THE ENVIRONMENT AS FORMED BY NATURE

COMPONENTS:

SPACE--THE UNLIMITED THREE-DIMENSIONAL EXPANSE IN WHICH EVENTS OCCUR AND IN WHICH MATTER AND ENERGY EXIST

TIME--THE CONTINUOUS DURATION IN WHICH EVENTS OCCUR AND ARE SEQUENTIALLY RELATED TO ONE ANOTHER AS IN PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

PHYSICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES SUCH FACTORS AS ATMOSPHERE, CLIMATE, SOIL, WATER, MINERALS AND TOPOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

BIOLOGICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES PLANTS, ANIMALS (INCLUDING HUMANS) AND MICROORGANISMS

HUMAN CONSTRUCTED ENVIRONMENT: THE ENVIRONMENT AS ALTERED OR CREATED BY HUMAN BEINGS

COMPONENTS:

SOCIOCULTURAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES HUMAN FORMATION OF CULTURAL PATTERNS (SUCH AS TECHNOLOGY, LANGUAGE, LAWS, VALUES AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS) AND OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS (SUCH AS ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, FAMILIAL, HEALTH, RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL)

SOCIOPHYSICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES HUMAN ALTERATIONS OF THE NATURAL PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AND CONSTRUCTED OBJECTS

SOCIOBIOLOGICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES HUMAN ALTERATIONS OF PLANT AND ANIMAL (INCLUDING HUMAN) SPECIES AND MICROORGANISMS

HUMAN BEHAVIORAL ENVIRONMENT: THE ENVIRONMENT OF SOCIALIZED HUMAN BEINGS AND THEIR BEHAVIOR

COMPONENTS:

PSYCHOLOGICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS OF INDIVIDUALS

BIOPHYSICAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES THE BIOPHYSICAL PRESENCE OF PERSONS, THEIR BODILY MOVEMENTS AND PHYSICAL POSTURE

SOCIAL--THAT PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT WHICH INCLUDES INTERACTING PERSONS AND GROUPS AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS OF SHORT OR LONG TERM DURATION

FIGURE 1. THE HUMAN ECOSYSTEM

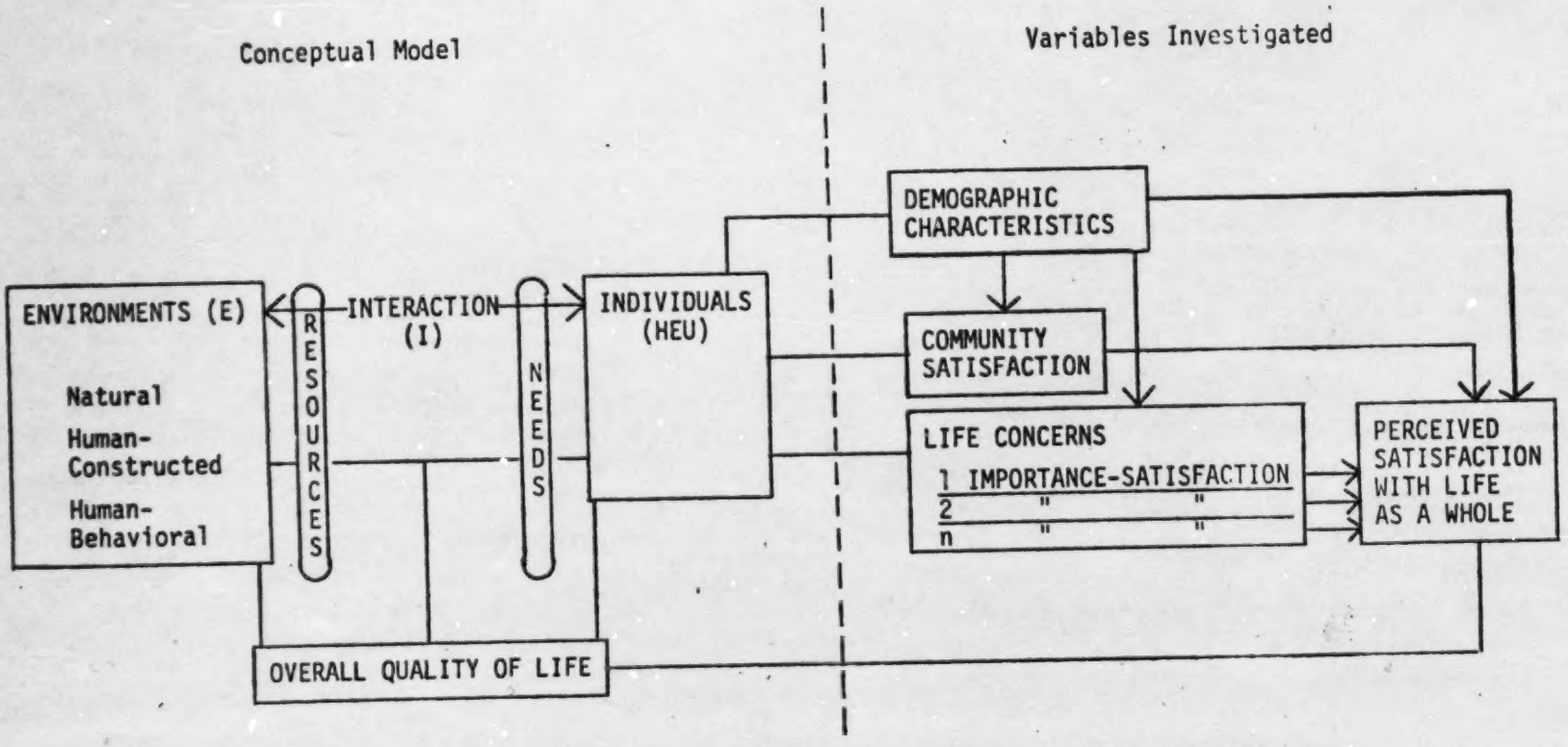
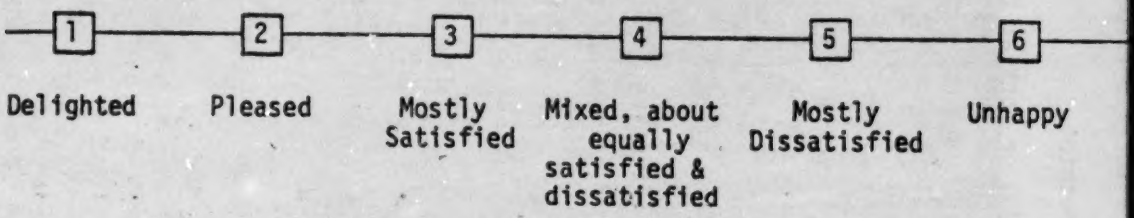


Figure 2. Schematic diagram of framework used in the study.

What number best describes how you feel about your life as a whole?



A = Neutral (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied)

B = Never thought about it

C = Does not apply to me

Figure 3. POQL scale.

Life Concerns in SALI and SALS Scales

A. Safety

B. Condition of the natural environment

C. Accomplishing something

D. Work - either a job or work at home

E. Your own health and physical condition

F. Fun and enjoyment

G. Religion

H. Clothing

I. The place you live - house or apartment

J. Financial Security

K. Beauty and attractiveness of your world

L. Family life

M. Sleep

N. Food

O. Having an interesting day-to-day life

P. Independence (freedom)

Q. The things you do and the times you have with your friends

R. The way you spend your spare time--your nonworking activities

S. What our National government is doing

T. Developing yourself and broadening your life

U. Car or other transportation

Figure 4. Life concerns in SALI and SALS scales.

Table 1. Distribution of Mean[a] POQL Scores

Scores[b]		%
1	(delighted)	3.1
1.5		1.5
2	(pleased)	9.2
2.5		24.6
3	(mostly satisfied)	32.3
3.5		16.9
4	(mixed)	9.2
4.5		3.1
		99.9

Note: $\underline{n}$ = 65.

[a]Overall mean = 2.923; S.D. = .7193

[b]There were no mean scores above 4.5

Table 2. Mean POQL Scores by Family Structure

Family Structure	Mean POQL Scores[a]
Single adult living alone	3.250
Adults, no children under 20	3.024
Adult(s) with children	2.467
$F = 4.75$[b]	

Note: $n = 65$

[a] A higher score indicates less satisfaction

[b] $p < .05$

Table 3. Mean POQL Scores by Income

Income	Mean POQL Scores[a]
Up to $3999	3.12
$4000--$7999	2.98
$8000--$11,999	2.906
$12,000 and up	2.188
$F = 3.70^b$	

Note: $n = 65$

[a] A higher score indicates less satisfaction.

[b] $p < .05$

Table 4. Mean POQL Scores by Income and Family Structure

Family Type	Mean POQL Scores
High income--children at home	2.3888
Low income--children at home	2.6000
High income--children absent	2.8636
Low income--children absent	3.0577

Table 5. Stepwise Regression Analysis of SALS Items and POQL Scores

SALS Items	r^2	Overall F[a]
Accomplishments	30.60	24.25
Family life	38.13	16.64
Work	41.23	12.40
Financial security	52.77	14.53
Interesting life	53.60	11.78
Fun	53.64	9.64
Developing self	53.81	8.16
Clothing	53.89	7.01
Independence	54.69	6.30
Transportation	54.74	5.56
House or apartment	57.95	5.63
Beauty	58.06	3.09[b]
National government	62.13	
Sleep	62.24	
Natural environment	62.41	
Food	63.65	
Religion	63.72	
Safety	63.84	
Friends	64.18	
Health	64.45	
Spare time activities	64.96	

[a] $p < .001$ for all but last 10 items.

[b] Overall F for remaining 10 items ($p < .005$).